

OFFER VERSUS SERVE (OVS)



in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)

OVS is a concept that applies to menu planning and the determination of reimbursable meals in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) school nutrition programs. It allows students to decline a certain number of food components in the meal and select the foods they prefer to eat, while reducing food cost and waste. OVS must be implemented at lunch in senior high schools but is optional for all other grades.

Overview of OVS at Lunch

OVS applies to the **daily** meal pattern requirements. Schools must **OFFER** all five food components in at least the minimum daily amounts. For a reimbursable lunch, students must **SELECT** at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables and the full serving (minimum daily amount) of at least two other food components. A **food component** is one of the five food groups that comprise the reimbursable lunch (milk, fruits, vegetables, grains and meat/meat alternates). A **food item** is a specific food offered within the five food components. For example, a hamburger on a whole-grain bun is one food item that contains two components (grains and meat/meat alternate).

The chart below summarizes the daily meal pattern requirements and the number of food components that students can decline under OVS at lunch. These requirements apply to all grade groups.

OVS Requirements at Lunch	
Must Offer Five Components *	Student May Decline
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One serving of milk **• One serving of fruits• One serving of vegetables• One serving of grains• One serving of meat/meat alternates 	<p>One or two food components but must take at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables</p> 
<p>* Serving sizes for each grade group must be at least the minimum daily required quantities in the NSLP meal pattern. The menu planner determines the daily serving size to meet the required weekly amounts for each component.</p> <p>** Schools must offer at least two different varieties (fat content and/or flavor) of unflavored low-fat (1%) or fat-free unflavored or flavored milk. Whole, reduced-fat (2%) and flavored low-fat milk cannot be served.</p>	

For a lunch to be reimbursable under OVS, schools must meet the criteria below.

- Menus must be planned to meet the NSLP meal pattern. All five food components must be offered to all students in at least the minimum daily serving. For information on the lunch meal pattern, see the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) [Menu Planning Guide for School Meals](#) and [Meal Patterns](#) Web page.
- Except for fluid milk, the food components may be offered in more than one food item. Meat/meat alternates may only be offered as a main dish (one food item) or a main dish and one other food item (two food items).
- The planned serving size for all food components must be at least the minimum daily serving for each grade group. Larger amounts may be served if the weekly menu does not exceed the limits for calories, saturated fat and sodium.
- Meals must be priced as a unit, i.e., students pay the same price regardless of whether they take three, four or five food components.



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- Students must take at least three of the five food components offered, including at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of fruits or vegetables and the minimum daily serving of at least two other food components.
- Students may decline any one or two food components except for at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of fruits or vegetables. Student selections of less than the minimum daily serving do not credit toward the reimbursable meal.
- Schools may allow students to select more than the minimum daily serving of any component. Student selections of additional servings from the same component credit as only one component toward the reimbursable meal. For example, a lunch for grades 9-12 provides 3 ounce equivalents (oz eq) of grains from 1 cup of brown rice (2 oz eq) and a 1-ounce whole-grain roll (1 oz eq). If a student selects both items, they credit as only one component (grains).
- If the menu offers the minimum daily serving as two separate food items, students must take both items to credit as one component for OVS. The chart below shows some examples.



Offering Minimum Daily Component as Two Food Items		
Meal Component and Minimum Daily Amount	Planned Menu Items	Required Student Selection for Full Component (Minimum Daily Serving)
GRADES K-5 AND 6-8		
Fruits (F) $\frac{1}{2}$ cup	$\frac{1}{4}$ cup of peaches $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of grapes	Students must take both food items to credit as the minimum daily serving of F. Students could select only $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of F if they also select at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of V and two other full components.
Vegetables (V) $\frac{3}{4}$ cup	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup of carrots $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of tomatoes	Students must take both food items to credit as the minimum daily serving of V. Students could select only $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of carrots if they also select two other full components, one of which could be $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of F. Students could select only $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of tomatoes if they also select at least $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of F and two other full components.
Meat/Meat Alternates (M/MA) 1 oz eq	1 tablespoon of peanut butter ($\frac{1}{2}$ oz eq) $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of yogurt ($\frac{1}{2}$ oz eq)	Students must take both food items to credit as the minimum daily serving of M/MA. Students could select either the peanut butter or yogurt alone if they also select at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of F or V and two other full components.
Grains (G) 1 oz eq	Two packages of whole-grain crackers ($\frac{1}{2}$ oz eq each)	Students must take both food items to credit as the minimum daily serving of G. Students could select only one package of crackers if they also select at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of F or V and two other full components.
GRADES 9-12		
F 1 cup	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup of peaches $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of grapes	Students must take both food items to credit as the minimum daily serving of F. Students could select only $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of F if they also select two other full components, one of which could be 1 cup of V.
V 1 cup	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup of green peppers $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of tomatoes	Students must take both food items to credit as the minimum daily serving of V. Students could select only $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of V if they also select two other full components, one of which could be 1 cup of F.
M/MA 2 oz eq	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup of low-fat yogurt (1 oz eq) 1 ounce low-fat cheese stick (1 oz eq)	Students must take both food items to credit as the minimum daily serving of M/MA. Students could select either the yogurt or cheese alone if they also select at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of F or V and two other full components.
G 2 oz eq	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup of whole grain-rich pasta (1 oz eq) 1 ounce whole-grain roll (1 oz eq)	Students must take both food items to credit as the minimum daily serving of G. Students could select either the pasta or roll alone if they also select at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of F or V and two other full components.

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Examples of OVS at Lunch

For a reimbursable lunch, students must select at least three of the five food components offered, including at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables and the minimum daily serving of two other components. The charts below show OVS examples for each grade group.



Examples of OVS for Grades K-5 and 6-8						
Planned Lunch	Meal Components and Amounts Provided	Student Selects	Food Items *	Full Food Components ** (Minimum Daily Serving)	Plus at least ½ cup of F or V?	REIMBURSABLE MEAL?
				MUST BE AT LEAST TWO	MUST BE “YES”	
Turkey (2 ounces) sandwich on whole-wheat bread (2 slices)	M/MA, 2 oz eq G, 2 oz eq	Turkey sandwich (M/MA, G) Milk (M)	2	3	No	No. The meal contains three full components (M/MA, G and M) but is missing at least ½ cup of F or V.
Broccoli florets (¾ cup) with low-fat dip	V, ¾ cup	Turkey sandwich (M/MA, G) Apple (F)	2	3	Yes	Yes. The meal contains three full components (M/MA, G and F).
Whole fresh apple, ½ cup	F, ½ cup	Turkey sandwich (M/MA, G) Broccoli (V)	2	3	Yes	Yes. The meal contains three full components (M/MA, G and V).
Choice of low-fat (1%) unflavored, fat-free unflavored or flavored milk (1 cup)	Milk (M), 1 cup	Broccoli (V) Apple (F) Milk (M)	3	3	Yes	Yes. The meal contains three full components (V, F and M).
		Turkey sandwich (M/MA, G) Apple (F) Milk (M)	3	4	Yes	Yes. The meal contains four full components (M/MA, G, F and M).
Cheeseburger (1 ½ ounces of cooked beef and ½ ounce of cheese) on whole-grain bun	M/MA, 2 oz eq G, 2 oz eq	Cheeseburger on bun (M/MA, G) Milk (M)	2	3	No	No. The meal contains three full components (M/MA, G and M) but is missing at least ½ cup of F or V.
Lettuce and tomato (¼ cup) Carrot sticks (½ cup)	V, ¾ cup	Cheeseburger without bun (M/MA) Carrot sticks (V) Milk (M)	3	2	Yes	Yes. The meal contains two full components (M/MA and M) and includes ½ cup of V.
Green apple (½ cup)	F, ½ cup	Lettuce/tomato (V) * Carrot sticks (V) Milk (M)	3	2	Yes	No. The meal contains only two full components (V and M). The full ¾-cup serving of V includes ½ cup of carrot sticks and ¼ cup of lettuce/tomato.
Choice of low-fat (1%) unflavored, fat-free unflavored or flavored milk (1 cup)	M, 1 cup	Carrot sticks (V) Apple (F) Milk (M)	3	2	Yes	Yes. The meal contains two full components (F and M) and includes ½ cup of V.
		Bun (G) Apple (F) Milk (M)	3	3	Yes	Yes. The meal contains three full components (G, F and M).
		Cheeseburger on bun (M/MA, G) Lettuce/tomato (V) * Milk (M)	3	3	No	No. The meal contains three full components (M/MA, G and M) but is missing at least ½ cup of F or V. The lettuce/tomato provides ¼ cup of V.
* Student selections of less than ½ cup of fruits or vegetables do not credit as a component for OVS, unless they are combined with additional servings of fruits or vegetables to meet the minimum requirement. To encourage student selections of reimbursable meals, offer all fruits and vegetables in ½-cup servings.						

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Examples of OVS for Grades 9-12

Planned Lunch	Meal Components and Amounts Provided	Student Selects	Food Items *	Full Food Components ** (Minimum Daily Serving)	Plus at least ½ cup of F or V?	REIMBURSABLE MEAL?
				MUST BE AT LEAST TWO	MUST BE "YES"	
Cheese pizza (2 ounces of cheese, 2 ounces of whole grain-rich crust) Tomato sauce on pizza (¼ cup) Coleslaw (¾ cup) Peaches (½ cup) Orange (½ cup) Choice of low-fat (1%) unflavored, fat-free unflavored or flavored milk (1 cup)	M/MA, 2 oz eq G, 2 oz eq V, 1 cup F, 1 cup M, 1 cup	Cheese pizza (M/MA, G, V) *	1	2	No	No. The meal contains two full components (M/MA and G) but is missing at least ½ cup of F or V.
		Cheese pizza (M/MA, G, V) * Peaches (F) **	2	2	Yes	Yes. The meal contains three full components (M/MA, G and F).
		Cheese pizza (M/MA, G, V) * Coleslaw (V) **	2	3	Yes	Yes. The meal contains three full components (M/MA, G and V).
		Orange (F) Peaches (F) Coleslaw (V) **	3	1	No	No. The meal contains only one full component (F) and ¾ cup of V. It is missing another full component.
Cheeseburger (1 ½ ounces of cooked beef, ½ ounce of cheese) on whole- grain bun Carrot sticks (1 cup) Strawberries (½ cup) Green grapes (½ cup) Choice of low-fat (1%) unflavored, fat-free unflavored or flavored milk (1 cup)	M/MA, 2 oz eq G, 2 oz eq V, 1 cup F, 1 cup M, 1 cup	Cheeseburger on bun (M/MA, G) Low-fat milk (M)	2	3	No	No. The meal contains three full components (M/MA, G and M) but is missing at least ½ cup of F or V.
		Grapes (F) ** Carrot sticks (V) Low-fat milk (M)	3	2	Yes	Yes. The meal contains two full components (V and M) and ½ cup of F.
		Carrot sticks (V) Strawberries (F) ** Fat-free milk (M)	3	2	Yes	Yes. The meal contains two full components (V and M) and includes ½ cup of F.
		Bun (G) Strawberries (F) ** Fat-free milk (M)	3	3	Yes	Yes. The meal contains two full components (G and M) and includes ½ cup of F.
		Cheeseburger on bun (M/MA, G) Grapes (F) **	3	3	Yes	Yes. The meal contains two full components (M/MA and G) and includes ½ cup of F.

* Student selections of less than ½ cup of fruits or vegetables do not credit as a component for OVS, unless they are combined with additional servings of fruits or vegetables to meet the minimum requirement. To encourage student selections of reimbursable meals, offer all fruits and vegetables in ½-cup servings.

Student selections of ½ cup of fruits or vegetables do not credit as the full 1-cup component, but they meet the OVS requirement for at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables. Student selections of the minimum daily serving of fruits and vegetables credit **once as either the full component or the minimum ½ cup requirement for OVS, but not both in the same meal.



For more information on OVS at lunch, see section 4 of the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) [Menu Planning Guide for School Meals](#) or contact the [school nutrition programs](#) staff in the CSDE Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education, 25 Industrial Park Road, Middletown, CT 06457.

This handout is available at www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/deps/nutrition/nslp_ovs_nslp.pdf.

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